

Cultural safety and gender

As well as creating personal safety, you need to create an environment that respects local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Gender issues are important here. Sometimes the topic of your workshop or talk will clearly be for males or females only, but at other times it may be unclear whether men and women should be separated. In these situations it is best to say something like:

'We're going to be talking about safe sex and condoms. How do you feel if everyone stays together in one group for this part?'

Often young people are willing to learn about sex and sexuality issues in mixed gender groups. The same goes for having male presenters talk to females and female presenters talk to males. This can vary from community to community. Often the cultural issue can be more about age than gender; for example, men may be comfortable with an older woman presenter, especially if she is non-Indigenous.

This story is from a very experienced, older, female non-Indigenous sexual health educator who spent a year in the Kimberley region of WA.

'My job was to do sexual health workshops with young people. In each community I would always start by getting permission from the women. I would meet with a group of women and explain the kinds of things I would be talking about to the young people and the women would give it the OK. In many communities, the women would say "We need you to talk to us as well." And then after I did a workshop with the women, they would say to me "You need to talk to the men, too." I would always check and say "Is that OK? I am a woman. Is it OK for me to talk to the men?" Usually they would say "You're an old girl. You're OK."

I gave many workshops to men. Sometimes the men invited me to return to give another workshop. In one place, 30 men showed up. Occasionally no men came. It varied from community to community.'

Source: [Diyadi – Can we talk?](#) A resource manual for sexual health workers who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. © Australasian Society for HIV Medicine 2011